

# Effective Constituent Communication: The Keys to Fostering Public Engagement

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# Communications in local government

Simply put, local government communicators provide information that is:

- Timely
- Accurate
- Complete

...so the public can make informed decisions about their community and daily life.



# EVERYONE is on the marketing team

No matter what your role is in local government, you are representing the organization every day. **Your words and actions translate to the public's perception of the organization.**

How many times have you heard:


“I never heard anything about that project”

“I’ve sent 10 emails and never got a response”

“I got bounced around to 3 different departments and still didn’t get an answer”

...we have the chance to make the public’s experience working with us a positive one.





# Communication is a key element to success in local government

- Public Engagement
- Transparency
- Crisis Management
- Short and Long-Term Planning
- Policy Implementation
- Internal Communication/Coordination

**“The Right Message, to the Right People, at the Right Time”**

# Communication can't be overlooked anymore



The digital age has brought about a paradigm shift in the way citizens interact with municipalities, leading to:

- Powerful tools for residents to voice their opinions and connect with local governments
- An increased demand for transparent communication
- Two-way engagement
- Citizen-centric platforms

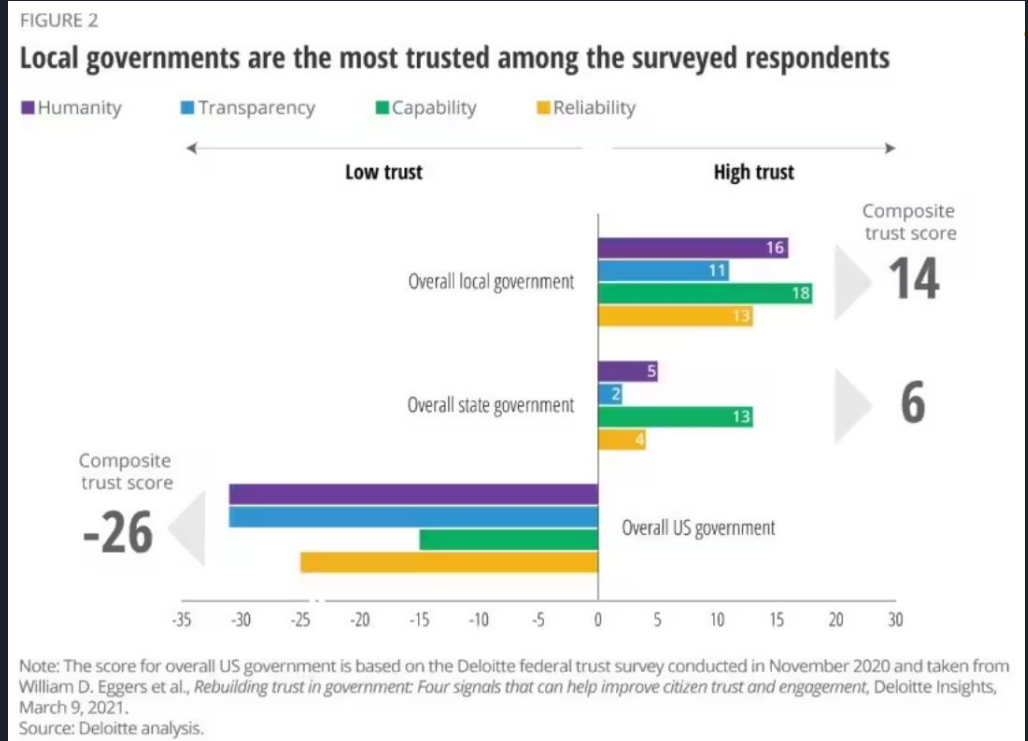
Residents' expectations for engagement with their local governments have evolved significantly.

# Trust, transparency and accountability

Distant government tends to be distrusted government.

People trust local government more than the feds and state gov - capitalize on that.

Information-sharing and engaging will build that trust.





# Positive civic experience

Often times, digital is usually the first experience someone has with government.

Invest in good digital tools to make sure residents' experience is a positive one.

**Your website should be primary source of information** - if people can't find what they need, they will go elsewhere, or the rumor mill will take over.

**Make updating your website a priority** - it will save you time, energy, and resources in the long run.

**Respond to questions or concerns on your social accounts** - it's called social media for a reason.

It's easily forgotten, but our residents are our customers, and we should operate from the mindset that we owe it to them to be upfront about the work we do and should make it easy for them to do business with us.



# What is public engagement?



**Intentional** - An active and intentional two-way dialogue between the public and governmental agencies, where the public has the opportunity to influence the decisions made by public-sector officials.

**Inclusive** - Government includes the public in the decision-making process.

**Hint:** Outreach is not engagement. Outreach is one-way communication, and doesn't collect feedback.



# Spectrum of engagement

Requires judgement, and knowledge of your stakeholders and community.

▶ INCREASING IMPACT OR PERCEPTION OF IMPACT ON PUBLIC ▶

	INFORM & CONSULT	INVOLVE	COLLABORATE
CONSIDER THIS OPTION WHEN ...	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Routine or fairly routine matter</li> <li>Time and/or budget constraints</li> <li>Clear legal process</li> <li>Manageable level of controversy</li> <li>Fairly simple set of interests</li> <li>Most issues have been heard, addressed through earlier processes</li> <li>Parties have tried but are unable to come to resolution</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Active and mobilized groups with competing views</li> <li>Strong need for dialogue (not just input)</li> <li>Need for multiple types of input designed for different groups</li> <li>Fair amount of controversy</li> <li>Complex issues</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Intense controversy, mobilized groups with competing views</li> <li>Need for education and buy-in by key constituencies</li> <li>Long-term, far-reaching effects</li> <li>Multiple jurisdictions</li> <li>Parties willing to meet, discuss (vs. referendum, court, etc.)</li> <li>Recommendation likely to be followed by decision makers</li> </ul>
MAY NOT BE BEST OPTION WHEN ...	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Unclear or competing jurisdictions</li> <li>Policy matters with unclear effects</li> <li>Strong controversy or polarized parties</li> <li>Public input will have no effect</li> <li>Need for two-way dialogue</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Intensive input will not satisfy need of public to influence the decision</li> <li>Time and/or budget constraints</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Too expensive for amount of controversy</li> <li>No negotiating room</li> <li>Other groups or individuals may intercede to invalidate any forthcoming proposals</li> <li>Key parties unwilling to meet</li> </ul>
POTENTIAL TOOLS & TECHNIQUES	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Fact sheets</li> <li>- FAQs</li> <li>Public comment (via web, in writing, hearings)</li> <li>Newsletter</li> <li>Media releases and events</li> <li>Informal surveys</li> <li>Presentations to civic groups, B&amp;Cs, HOAs, at Open Houses, etc.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Workshops, charrettes</li> <li>Stakeholder meetings</li> <li>Focus groups</li> <li>Techniques from Inform and Consult</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Citizen advisory committee</li> <li>Participatory decision-making</li> <li>Consensus-building</li> </ul>
CITIZEN ROLE	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Citizen Role: Residents engage to be informed and to influence</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Citizen Role: Residents engage to advocate and to help frame issues</li> <li>- Residents engage to understand technical issues and how to effectively advocate</li> <li>- Residents engage to help define problem and find solutions</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Citizen Role: Residents are collaborators</li> <li>- Residents engage to identify different stakeholder interests</li> <li>- Residents engage to make informed decisions and forge effective compromises</li> </ul>

Adapted from IAP2

# Example of Inform and Consult

Annual hydrant flushing program:

Tools you may use:

- Announcement on website
- FAQ
- Post to social media
- Video explaining what it is and what it isn't



# Example of Involve

Hiring a new Police Chief

Tools you may use:

- Details of recruitment process on website
- Public comment form
- Focus groups
- Get-to-know meetings and/or online Q&As with finalists

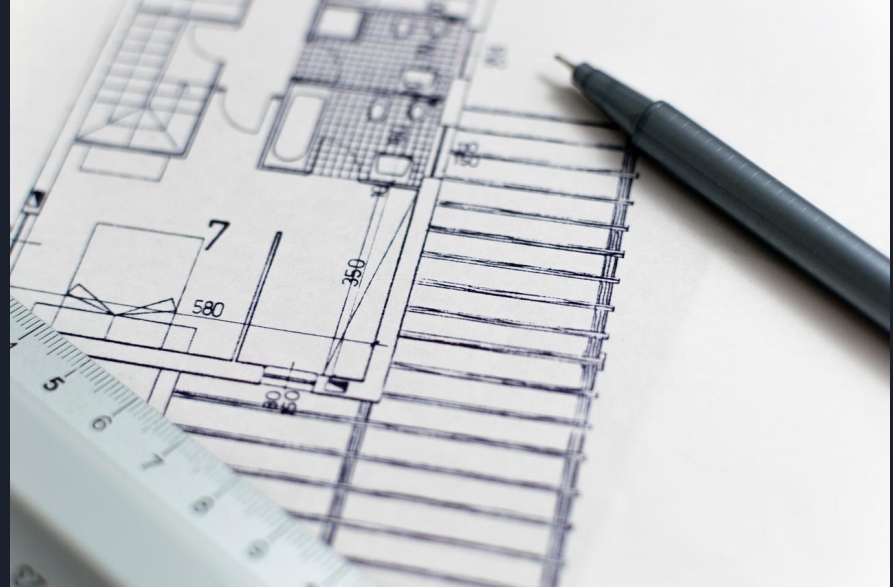


# Example of Collaborate

Building a new high school

Tools you may use:

- School building committee
- Stakeholder meetings
- Comprehensive webpage or dedicated website
- Webinars
- Invitation to milestone events



# Information consumption and sharing

## Media Fragmentation – Attention Shift

LIVE  
MEDIA  
GROUP  
CROSS  
MEDIAS



The Internet has fundamentally changed the way people find, discover, share, shop, and connect

# Information consumption and sharing



Chris Maddern  [@chrismaddern](#) [Follow](#)

Didn't exist in 2006:

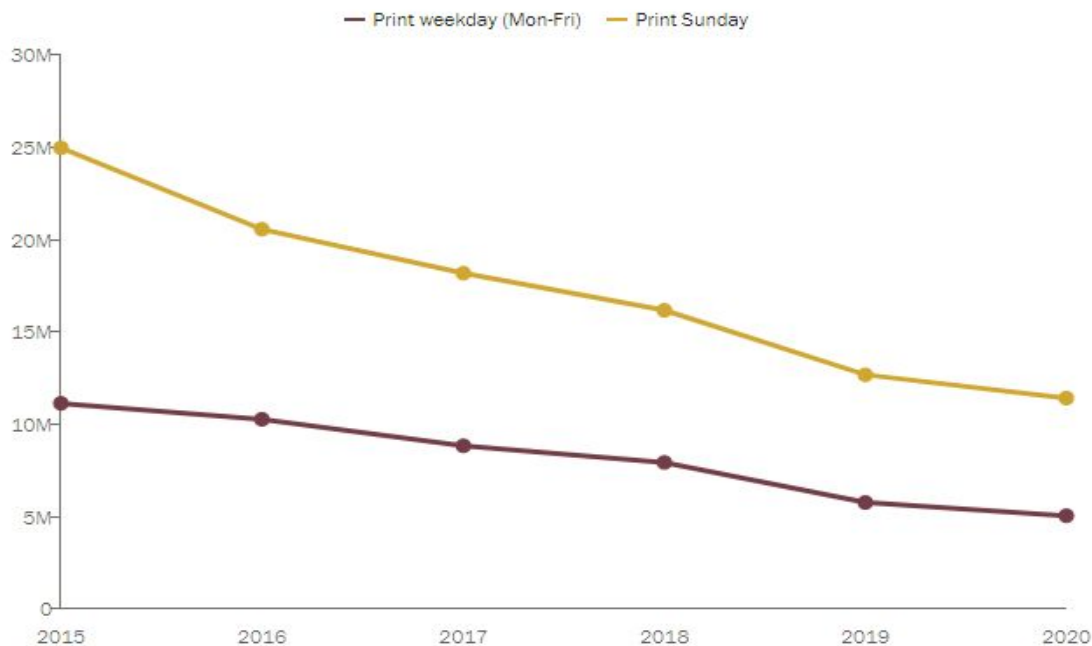
- iPhone
- iPad
- Kindle
- Uber
- Airbnb
- Android
- Oculus
- Spotify
- Nest
- Stripe
- Square
- Instagram
- Slack
- Spotify
- Snapchat

RETWEETS 13,202 LIKES 19,621 

9:37 PM - 19 Dec 2016 from [Manhattan, NY](#)

## Print circulation of locally focused newspapers at its lowest since 2015

*Print circulation of locally focused U.S. daily newspapers*



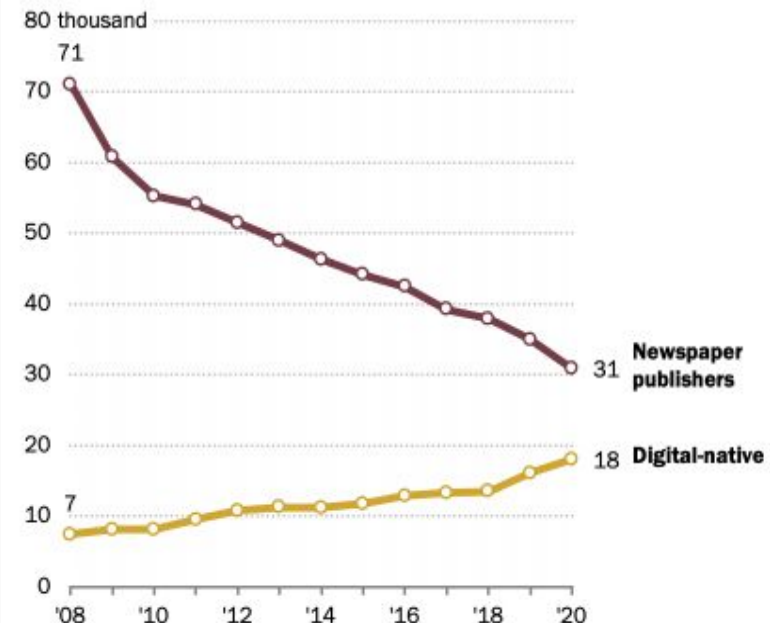
Note: Figures are taken from an analysis of more than 200 newspapers for weekday circulation and more than 400 papers for Sunday circulation. Figures do not include the following publications with a national audience: The New York Times, The Washington Post, The Wall Street Journal and USA Today. Figures are not adjusted according to pre-2015 data from Editor & Publisher and are thus not comparable to the estimated figures published in Pew Research Center's State of the News Media newspapers fact sheet. Affiliated publications are not included in the analysis. Weekday circulation only includes those publications reporting a Monday-Friday average. Data reflects either three-month averages (2015-2019) or the six-month period ending Sept. 30 (2020).

Source: Pew Research Center analysis of Alliance for Audited Media data.

PEW RESEARCH CENTER

## Newsroom employment at U.S. newspapers has plummeted since 2008 but grown at digital publishers

*Number of U.S. newsroom employees by news industry, in thousands*



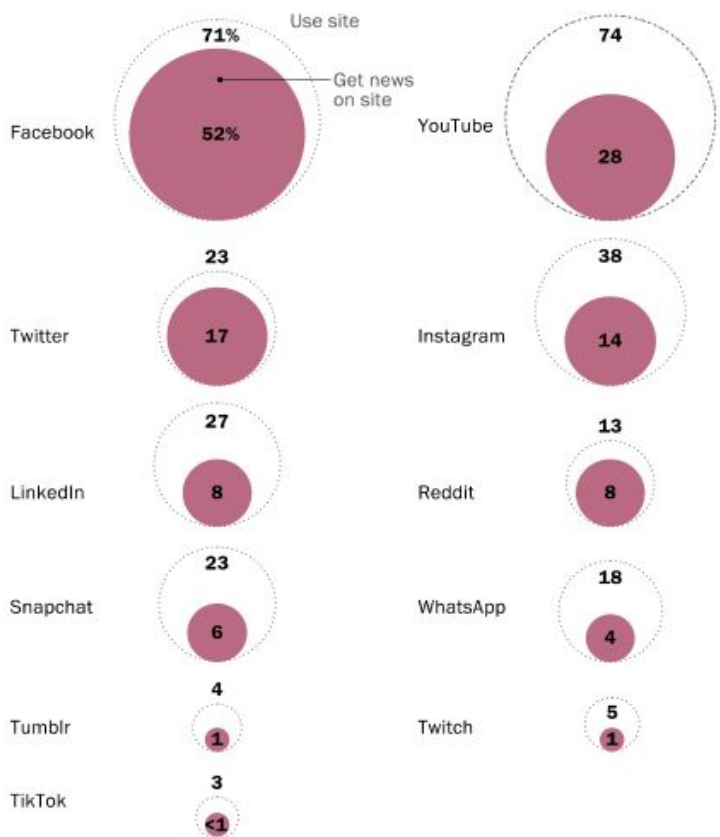
Note: The OEWS survey is designed to produce estimates by combining data collected over three-year period. Newsroom employees include news analysts, reporters and journalists; editors; photographers; and television, video and film camera operators and editors. Digital-native sector data is based on "other information services" industry code, whose largest segment is "internet publishing and broadcasting and web search portals."

Source: Pew Research Center analysis of Bureau of Labor Statistics Occupational Employment and Wage Statistics data.

PEW RESEARCH CENTER

## Social media sites as pathways to news

% of U.S. adults who ...



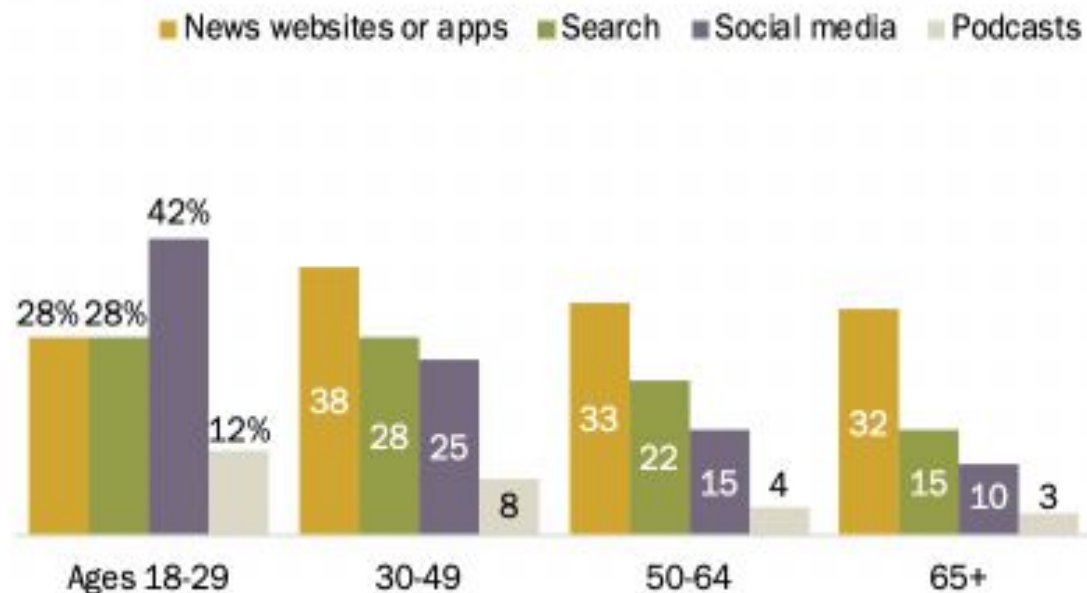
Source: Survey conducted July 8-21, 2019.

"Americans Are Wary of the Role Social Media Sites Play in Delivering the News"

PEW RESEARCH CENTER

## Online, most turn to news websites except for the youngest, who are more likely to use social media

% of U.S. adults who get news *often* from ...



Source: Survey of U.S. adults conducted Aug. 31-Sept. 7, 2020.

PEW RESEARCH CENTER



# Be your own newsroom

The screenshot shows the City of Cambridge website homepage. At the top, it features the city logo and navigation links for 'Quick Links', 'Subscribe', and 'Translate'. Below this is a search bar and a main banner for 'Electrify Cambridge' with a 'Learn More' button. A grid of service icons is displayed below, including 'Pay a Bill Online', 'Open Meeting Portal', 'Report an Issue Online', 'Library Hours & Locations', 'View Property Database', 'Pay Parking Tickets', 'Access Online Services', 'Online Permitting', 'Curbside Collections', and 'Apply for a Job'.

This screenshot shows a page titled 'CITY OF CAMBRIDGE DAILY UPDATES & INFORMATION'. It features a 'New Resident Resource Website' section with a large image of a cityscape at sunset.

The screenshot shows the Twitter profile for the City of Cambridge (@CambMA). The profile includes the city logo, a bio stating it is the official Twitter account, and statistics showing 736 following and 21.5K followers. A photo of the city skyline at night is visible in the background.

The screenshot shows the Facebook profile for the City of Cambridge (Official). It features a cover photo of the city skyline and a profile picture of the city logo. The page has 18K followers and 23 following.

The screenshot shows a page titled 'City View' with the subtitle 'A Look at City Initiatives for FY24'. It features an article about 'Cambridge's Commitment to Affordable Housing: Preserving and Creating Sustainable Communities' with an image of a modern building.

The screenshot shows a page titled 'The CAMBRIDGE LIFE' with the subtitle 'A COMMUNITY NEWSLETTER'. It features an image of two people in a library setting and an article titled 'Supporting Cambridge's Vulnerable Populations'.

The screenshot shows the Nextdoor profile for the City of Cambridge. It includes the city logo, address (795 Massachusetts Ave, Cambridge), and a description of the city's unique community. There are 'Subscribed' and 'Share' buttons at the bottom.

The image shows a sign for 'City of Cambridge Participatory Budgeting'. The sign asks 'How would you spend \$500,000 to improve the City?' and encourages voting on 'MARCH 22-28'. It provides the website 'www.cambridgema.gov/yourbudget' for more information.



# Know your audience

You know your community best

- Take the time to understand the segments of your community and how they consume their information.

If you don't know - conduct a survey - even if it's just a free online survey tool

- Have an idea of how your community gets news.

Reaching the right audience can be the difference between community support or not.

“

ANY INFORMATION YOU PROVIDE  
FOR YOUR **TARGET AUDIENCE** TO  
CONSUME IS **CONTENT**

# ID what channels work in your community

Where do you get *most* of your information about Cambridge-related issues: [READ RESPONSES 01-08]

2020	PHONE	ONLINE
01. Television	7%	1%
02. Radio	3	1
03. Newspapers	9	4
04. City Newsletters or Daily Email Update	17	47
05. Social media sites	20	11
06. Meetings	--	1
07. Word of mouth	5	4
08. Websites	33	21
09. Next Door Platform	1	2
10. (Other)	1	1
11. (Don't know)	3	6

Consistency - make sure you can keep feeding the beast.

## Friends of Medway, MA



Discussion Featured Members Events Media Files

Tracy Garber  
March 4 · 🌐

Has anyone else had issues with accuracy of water meter reading? Our usage hasn't changed, if anything, we've been using less water throughout the winter. None of our toilets or faucets leak, and we turned off the supply to our outside spigots in late September or early October. I was shocked when opening this today. I'll call town hall on Monday, but before doing so, wondering if anyone else has a similar experience?

Editing to add: several people thoughtfully alerted me to a service I didn't know existed, which I will link here. After registering, noticed a significant anomaly that's recorded between December 14-16, a mysterious astronomical increase (16.7k gallons per hour, totaling 399,864 gallons over a 24 hour period) in water usage, that didn't actually occur to my knowledge. Had it been a leak, as some have suggested, it wouldn't have resolved on its own. I suggest registering for this service and reviewing your usage. I'd be interested to know if anyone else has had similar anomalies, and if so & willing, please share the date range. Hope we can get to the bottom of this issue. Thank you to all for chiming in!

<https://www.townofmedway.org/.../webforms/aquahawk-alerting>

Bill Number	Bill Date	Customer Number	Account Number	DUPLICATE	DUPLICATE	DUPLICATE	DUPLICATE	DUPLICATE
	02/28/2023							03/30/2023
DESCRIPTION	PREVIOUS READ DATE	CURRENT READ DATE	READ TYPE	CURRENT READ	PREVIOUS READ	USAGE	CURRENT CHARGE	
WATER TRASH RES 1 FAMILY+	11/21/2022	02/22/2023	ACTUAL READ	66,321	60,223	6,098	\$1,142.28	\$93.75



# Blend digital and non-digital communications to maximize reach

Not everyone is on digital. Make sure you integrate non-digital methods into your strategy.

Some common non-digital tools:

- Physical signage
- Phone calls
- Neighborhood meetings
- Door-to-door outreach
- Tax bill inserts
- Community partners

Not every piece of information can go out on every platform.

Use your judgement and knowledge of your community to determine when to use both digital and non-digital methods

# Audit your communication channels and assets

Map out the digital/non digital channels available to you, including community partners, so when that important project comes up, you can more effectively plan your comms. **Hint: Establish relationships with your community partners ahead of time!**

If you have limited resources, what has the highest impact? Rather than spreading yourself thin when you can't adequately support it. Look at analytics—doesn't have to be a deep dive.





# Key takeaways



If you aren't already, make sure any information your org is sending out to the public is also available and accessible on your website.

Through surveys, feedback, and review of analytics, determine which channels your community are most receptive to. Think of the highest impact channels and focus on them.

Public engagement is intentional and inclusive. Outreach  $\neq$  engagement.

If you're not saying anything, you're saying something.

# Questions?

Questions after the presentation? Email us:

Sean Dugan, [sdugan@easton.ma.us](mailto:sdugan@easton.ma.us)

Jeremy Warnick, [jwarnick@cambridgema.gov](mailto:jwarnick@cambridgema.gov)

